



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
OFFICE – 928-871-7917
CELL – 928-309-8532
pressoffice@opvp.org

Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., joins Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to sign San Juan River Water Settlement; will bring \$1 billion project

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., joined Interior Secretary Ken Salazar earlier this month to sign the historic San Juan Navajo Water Rights Settlement, which is expected to bring a \$1 billion water project to the Navajo Nation.

“By signing this agreement today, the Obama administration is taking another step toward honoring the U.S.’s promises to Indian nations and helping communities gain access to clean, safe water supplies,” Secretary Salazar said Dec. 17 at the Colorado River Water Users Association Annual Conference in Las Vegas, Nev. “This settlement honorably closes a long chapter of litigation and will bring real benefits to the Navajo people and surrounding communities.”

The San Juan Navajo Water Rights Settlement resolves more than 20 years of efforts to resolve the Navajo Nation’s water rights, protect existing uses of water, allow for future growth, and provide potable water for 80,000 Navajos for the first time.

President Shirley said he learned from his grandmother that the real monsters all people must confront are hunger, thirst, greed, jealousy, bigotry and all manner of diseases. They know no color or creed and prey upon all equally.

He added that by standing together, working together and collaborating toward a common goal, good things can be achieved for the people.

“It takes working together to beat the beast,” President Shirley said. “And that’s why I’m very thankful. Because

of the settlement, it will bring water to 80,000 of my people, many of whom are elders, up in years, who are hauling water to this day. It comes from the heart when I say thank you, Secretary Salazar.”



Navajo Nation Water Rights Attorney Stanley Pollack, left, joined Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., for the historic signing of the San Juan River Water Settlement in Las Vegas, Nev. on Dec. 17. Secretary Salazar said the signing clears the way for \$1 billion to construct the Navajo-Gallup Pipeline that will bring water to 80,000 Navajos for the first time. Tami A. Heilemann Photo

Navajo Nation Water Rights Attorney Stanley Pollack, who has worked on the settlement for 24 years as a lawyer for the Nation, called the settlement the biggest accomplishment of his professional career.

“But it’s just another step in the long road we have to go to get Navajos drinking water,” he said. “We are now on our way toward implementation of the settlement which quantifies the rights of the Navajo Nation to the San Juan River and brings drinking water to the Navajo Nation through the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project.”

On March 25, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act into law, which authorized the settlement.

"It's hard to overstate the real and measurable impact this will have on people's lives," President Obama said. "People like Frank Chee Willetto, a Navajo Code Talker in World War II, who's joined us today. And because of this legislation, Frank, along with 80,000 others in the Navajo Nation, will have access to clean running water for the very first time."

The Navajo Nation first signed the agreement with the State of New Mexico on April 19, 2005. This month's signing fulfills a federal promise to support the Navajo people by providing a long-term sustainable water supply that will reduce the need for hauling water, improve health conditions on the reservation, and provide the foundation for future economic development in northwestern New Mexico.

President Shirley congratulated the Navajo Nation Council for the courage to approve the settlement agreement in 2004, and the patience to wait for Congress to act.

He also thanked the Navajo Nation Water Rights Commission, the staff of the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and the Navajo Water Resources Department for their diligent work.

"Nothing is ever accomplished without working together, and this step forward demonstrates that clearly," he said.

The settlement resolves a water dispute that began in 1975 between the state of New Mexico and the Navajo Nation over the resources in the San Juan River.

Although the Nation and the State signed the settlement on April 19, 2005, it could not be implemented without legislation to authorize a series of water infrastructure projects — including creating a water settlement and providing for funds for water resources.

Congressional authorization of the settlement will appropriate funds over time for the construction of the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project, rehabilitation of farming projects, construction of water wells for public water systems, and hydrographic surveys.

The settlement allocates more than 600,000 acre-feet of diversions and 325,670 acre-feet of depletions per year within New Mexico from the San Juan River of the Upper Colorado River Basin for use by the Navajo Nation.

For the past 18 months, the Navajo Nation, the State of New Mexico, and the federal government have worked to conform all of the settlement documents to the authorizing legislation.

The legislation sets forth milestones that must occur for the settlement to be final and effective.

The first milestone was the execution of the revised settlement agreement by the Secretary before December 31, 2010.

This sets the Nation on its way toward implementation of the settlement which quantifies the rights of the Navajo Nation to the San Juan River and brings drinking water to the Navajo Nation through the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project.

N.M. Gov. Bill Richardson was unavailable to sign the settlement agreement with President Shirley and Secretary Salazar because he was been negotiating with North Korea. Consequently, the governor and the New Mexico attorney general signed the agreement prior to the official signing.

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